

# Interesting Experiment in Co-operative Living



Furniture of the craftsman order is made by one department of the colony and this is a sample of their work.

SINCE the earliest days the community spirit natural to mankind has caused the asking of the questions: Can we band together for our own good?—how can we co-operate? Back in the desert days they asked it, and the reason was that savage men swept down on the more civilized camps to kill and to plunder. In feudal days men asked it so that they might be free from bonds of slavery. Later, it was asked with religious freedom as its motive, and today we are still asking it, now chiefly for an economic reason.

Can men and women live happily in co-operative colonies? Are such colonies successful? Have any of them developed a code of living which would appear lasting?

Yes, they have—the Shakers, for instance. These semi-religious people were able to live in co-operative colonies for over a hundred years, and only the refusal of the more modern mind to follow their form of worship made their end a necessity. Many students of economics have said if a band of men and women could live as compatibly as did the Shakers, the problem of co-operative living would be solved.

And, while its presence is unknown to most people, such a co-operative colony exists; in fact, has existed long enough to warrant its serious consideration by students of American economics.

Twenty years ago a successful criminal lawyer of California, Job Harriman, determined that he would experiment in the founding of a co-operative colony, but it was not until fifteen years later that he was able to put his plan into action. He was no fanatic. Well educated, with the intention of becoming a minister, he turned toward law, and after years of study started practice in Los Angeles. This work brought him into



Job Harriman, founder, general manager and leader of the colony.

close relationship with all classes of people, and thoughts of brotherhood, a subject over which he had often pondered, became more and more insistent. It was not any fanatic spirit that led him on—he was a sane man, but he felt that a band of people could pledge themselves to live together in harmony, and work for mutual good, without straying from the paths of law and order, or even from the path of conventions. He made no great outcry when he left his fashionable home in the suburbs of the city—he just slipped away and started to work.

## All Own Equal Shares

WHAT happened? Well, Mr. Job Harriman learned a great deal about human nature. Also he moved his colony from California to the hills of west Louisiana. There the colony he started is flourishing today, with all the members owning equal shares in the land, the houses, the live stock, the industrial enterprises. There is a bakery that sells at cost to the colonists. A weekly and monthly newspaper are issued, as well as a monthly magazine. The library is the finest in the western part of the state of Louisiana. There is a shop where shoes are repaired and which receives shoes from a radius of twenty miles; also a saw-mill, and a swimming-pool for recreation. For entertainment, there is a community theater, for education, there are good schools. And there is also a

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community kindergarten and nursery so that tired mothers, or mothers who are interested in the business world, may safely leave their youngsters and call for them when the duties of the day are finished. The United States Government is so decidedly interested in the community experiment that the officials gladly installed a Demonstration Farm and Agricultural Experiment Station.

And the colonists have called their post office address Newllano.

"It is our firm belief that in the common ownership of land and industry, with an equal wage and equal opportunity, lies the solution of the many problems with which every country is grappling," says Ernest S. Wooster, who is the vice-president and acting manager of the colony when Mr. Harriman is away on business. "I think that such a plan as ours could banish poverty, and create a new set of ideals."

The thought on hearing such a belief is, how can there be success when everyone is his or her own boss? Who says who shall do a certain kind of work? Who allots the houses of the town? Who sets the hours to start work and stop?

"The general line of questions," Mr. Wooster laughed. "Only many people write us serious letters and ask if we all eat at one table, and if we ever wear one another's clothes. It's a fact that when I answer and say that we are very rational beings, that many of our friends are disappointed."

"In reality the colonists at Newllano have made living very easy. In the matter of homes, for instance, the agreement has been that the houses should be allotted according to priority, size of the family, etc. You know, this colony is incorporated, and is conducted on very business-like lines. The workers employ themselves, and as they are working for themselves, there is no idleness. It would not be allowed. An idle good-for-nothing would not be welcome to stay very long with us. We settled the matter of work by having the rule, no work, no dinner. Simple, isn't it?"

"Perhaps the greatest point that is overlooked by most people who are interested in co-operation is that equal ownership does not necessarily mean equal authority. This colony has lasted for six years because when a job was in progress the man best fitted for that job was put in charge. The other men were to do as he directed. All shared in the profits, but all were not in authority. That is an important thing to remember."

The principal work of the busy, no-slacker colonists is farming. The land that they control is very fertile. Sweet potatoes and peanuts are the principal crops. There is a peanut butter factory and sweet potato curing plant and a cannery is to be added this year.

The town of Newllano has a very good hotel, famed in its neighborhood for its wholesome cooking. Visitors are welcome, but it is not for visitors alone. Many of the colonists eat there. Meals are ten cents each to colonists. How do they do it in these days of the high cost of food? Well, when you are raising practically all your own meats and vegetables, when the foodstuffs are turned into a common fund, and it is only the unusual foodstuffs that you have to buy, the cost per capita is naturally small. What about the cost of labor? This is a co-operative colony. Everyone helps, and in the case of the hotel most of its employees are women members not otherwise profitably employed, but who would have to be supported, and as the hotel is a convenience for the workers of the colony, wages are not balanced against the cost of meals.

The colonists long ago discovered that the wage and the cost of living have close relationship, that must be observed. They have worked out this theory to advantage in their stores. They sell to themselves at cost, just as they eat at cost.

## Extra Allowance If Married

JUST as there is a good hotel, there is an adequate hospital. If a man who is the head of a family has to go to the hospital, he pays nothing, and is paid no money for the time he is incapacitated. But his family have their allowance for living purposes just the same. The plan of allotment of money is just, and has worked without causing friction. Any adult worker, married or single, receives the same sum of money. But the married man is paid an extra allowance for his children, this money being taken from the general fund. In other words, the cost of the upbringing of children is shared by every worker, and is counted a social obligation. An old age pension fund has been started, and this will work out in the same manner as the fund for children.

Believing that in order to give a child a well-balanced education he should understand and apply in actual daily life what is learned from books, the colony schools put the children into industries during half of each day. Boys go into the saw-mill, blacksmith shop, print shop, bakery, and on to the farm. Girls go into the colony hotel, store, and office. Several girls have become proficient stenographers, several boys have learned printing, shoemaking, woodworking and other trades.

The purpose is to make the "book learning" vital. For instance, the boy who learns in school how to measure lumber, applies his knowledge. The girl who learns that certain goods cost certain amounts and are sold at a certain percentage of profit applies this knowledge in the store. In the print shop a variety of branches of knowledge are put into actual, daily application. The slogan of the colony school is "Learn by doing."

There are about 150 persons in the colony, but there is no limit to the number that may eventually be ac-

commodated. The colony plan contemplates the establishing of industries to employ large numbers of persons, the extending of farming over the lands to put hundreds of families on the soil in a genuine "back to the land" movement. The hope is to weave a social scheme into the lives of the colonists, whether in the colony town or on the land, which will hold them together, and make them a co-operating force to demonstrate their ideals and encourage others to follow their plan.

The home life of the colony is simple and interesting. When everyone in the community

gets the same wage it is not necessary to make any attempt at flashy style or entertaining. No one is either really rich or poor. Misfortune in the shape of death or sickness hits the whole colony, for if the head of a family dies, a worker goes. The colony will care for his family. If there is a shortage in, say, flour or sugar, everyone is short. If there is an excess, all will get an extra share.

## There Is Play as Well as Work

WHEN the evening hours tell that the day's work is over, entertainment is encouraged, for all work and no play never was successful. There people are no strait-laced religious fanatics. Puritans who do not believe in fun. Their theater is co-operative, and admission is free. Any expense is cared for by the community. Dancing classes are started regularly, and dances held frequently. Music is one of the chief pastimes, the colony getting together to sing, to listen to good music. Musical instruction is a feature.

Perhaps more important than any of the foregoing reasons for the unusual success of a co-operative organization is the fact that this colony realizes that this is the age of the independent woman. Women have always had a voice in the affairs of the colony, and what the women members consider even more important is the fact that they are encouraged to industry. The belief that unbroken home influence is not the best for the woman, that they should have the opportunity of mingling with their friends and enjoying every advantage of educational, business and social life, is strictly observed. Mothers are practically subsidized by the colony. They are given a special allowance which starts before the baby is born and goes on for two years after. A rigid belief of the colonists is that the home should be a place of rest and recreation.

These colonists are not trying to force their beliefs on the world. They are only trying their beliefs on themselves. They are really a community of solid Americans, prospering or failing together. If you are interested in what they are doing, they are glad to tell you. If not, they try no propaganda.

One thing is certain, that they have established a colony worth the consideration of every student in economics.



A sample of garden truck raised for home consumption by the colonists.